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The Influence of Digital Leadership on Employee Performance Through Job Satisfaction as an Intervening Variable in Company Employees

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ABSTRACT

The rapid pace of digital transformation demands leadership styles capable of adapting to technological change in order to sustain organizational productivity, and this study is motivated by a gap in understanding the psychological mechanisms bridging digital leadership and employee performance. This study aims to examine the effect of digital leadership on job satisfaction, the effect of digital leadership on employee performance, and the mediating role of job satisfaction among company employees. A quantitative explanatory approach was employed involving 125 employees selected through proportionate stratified random sampling. Primary data were collected through a Likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed using hierarchical linear regression and the Sobel test with IBM SPSS 26. The results indicate that digital leadership has a significant positive effect on job satisfaction, digital leadership and job satisfaction jointly and partially exert significant effects on employee performance, and job satisfaction significantly mediates the effect of digital leadership on employee performance. The study concludes that optimizing employee performance through digital leadership requires strengthening job satisfaction as the primary linking mechanism, so that leadership digitalization strategies must be integrated with sustainable policies for employee psychological well-being.

INTRODUCTION

The massive digital transformation that has taken place over the past decade has fundamentally changed the way organizations manage their human resources, including the relationship patterns between leaders and subordinates. The presence of information technology integrated into almost all lines of company operations requires the emergence of a new leadership style capable of accommodating these changes, which has become known as *digital leadership*. This concept refers to a leadership model that understands digital technology and is able to utilize it to drive transformation of the organization and its individuals (Topcuoglu et al., 2023) . In the context of modern companies, this type of leadership is not merely the technical ability to operate digital devices, but rather the strategic capacity to align digital initiatives with the organization's direction while preparing employees for continuous change (Lin, 2024) .

This phenomenon is becoming increasingly relevant considering that employee performance *is* a key indicator of organizational success in facing increasingly competitive business conditions. Various studies have shown that the effectiveness of digital leadership does not always have a direct impact on employee performance, but is often mediated by certain psychological variables, one of which is job satisfaction. In addition to job satisfaction, several studies have also highlighted the role of organizational commitment as another mechanism that helps bridge the relationship between digital leadership and employee performance, as found by Samuel & Ramli (2024) in the manufacturing industry. These findings reinforce the view that the impact of digital leadership on employee performance is multi-path and cannot be reduced to a single connecting variable.

Job satisfaction is viewed as an employee's affective state toward their work, which can strengthen or weaken the influence of leadership style on individual and team performance. A literature survey shows that research on the relationship between digital leadership, job satisfaction, and employee performance has developed quite rapidly, but the results are not entirely consistent. Hidayat et al. (2023) found that digital leadership, information technology, and digital competence significantly influence employee performance through the mediation of job satisfaction in the context of companies in the digital era. Similarly, Wang et al. (2025) revealed that digital leadership also encourages employee innovative performance through *job crafting mechanisms* and individual-job fit. On the other hand, Ginting et al. (2024) emphasized that work stress and job satisfaction together have a significant influence on employee performance in government institutions, demonstrating that job satisfaction continues to play a crucial psychological role.

Putra & Cahyani (2024) also demonstrated that talent management, knowledge management, and work-life balance influence employee performance, with job satisfaction as the connecting variable. Nurhayati et al. (2024) found a similar pattern in the context of learning organizations, with employee competency as the intervening variable. Internationally, Al-Husban et al. (2021) found that digital leadership influences organizational performance through innovation capacity as a mediator, while Asif et al. (2024) demonstrated that digital transformation, corporate culture, and leadership collectively improve the sustainable performance of manufacturing companies in China. These two findings reinforce the urgency of cross-contextual studies on how digital leadership translates into improved organizational performance through various mediating pathways. However, studies specifically integrating the three variables of digital leadership, job satisfaction, and employee performance simultaneously in the context of private companies in Indonesia are still relatively limited.

Lin (2024) through a systematic review of the literature highlighted that the majority of digital leadership research is still fragmented in the public sector or educational institutions, so that generalizations to the context of commercial companies have the potential to be biased. This gap is the novelty *and* urgency of this research, namely the need for empirical studies that place job satisfaction as an intervening variable in the relationship between digital leadership and employee performance specifically for corporate employees, in order to enrich *the state of the art* research that previously focused more on the health, government, and education sectors. Based on this description, this study aims to: first, analyze the influence of digital leadership on employee performance directly; second, analyze the influence of digital leadership on employee job satisfaction; and third, examine the role of job satisfaction as an intervening variable in bridging the influence of digital leadership on employee performance in corporate employees. This research is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions.

Theoretically, this study enriches the human resource management literature by presenting an integrative model that positions job satisfaction as the link between digital leadership and employee performance, while addressing the research gap identified by Lin (2024) . Practically, the findings of this study can serve as a reference for company management in formulating digital leadership development policies oriented towards increasing job satisfaction, ultimately optimizing employee performance sustainably.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research is an explanatory research *that* aims to explain the causal relationship between variables, namely the influence of *digital leadership* on *employee performance* through *job satisfaction* as an intervening variable. The approach used is a quantitative approach with a positivistic paradigm, in which social phenomena are measured numerically and analyzed through statistical procedures to test previously formulated hypotheses (Sugiyono, 2022) . The data used in this study consists of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained directly from respondents through a closed-ended questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale, while secondary data came from internal company documents such as employee performance reports and personnel data. The study population was all 180 permanent employees of the company.

The sample size was calculated using the *Slovin formula* with a 5% margin of error, resulting in a sample size of 125 respondents. The sampling technique used *proportionate stratified random sampling* , which is random sampling that considers the proportion of employees in each division to maintain balanced data representation. Data collection techniques were carried out in three ways. First, an online questionnaire was distributed to 125 respondents using an instrument that had been tested for validity and reliability through *product-moment correlation tests* and *Cronbach's Alpha coefficients* with a minimum threshold of 0.60. Second, brief interviews were conducted with five management representatives to strengthen the interpretation of the quantitative data. Third, a documentation study was used to explore supporting data in the form of the company's annual performance evaluation report. The data analysis technique used path analysis *based* on multiple linear regression with the assistance of IBM SPSS version 26. Given the relatively simple sample size and model complexity, hierarchical regression was deemed more appropriate (Ghozali, 2021) .

Before hypothesis testing was conducted, the data was first tested through a series of classical assumption tests including normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity tests to ensure the regression model met *the Best Linear Unbiased Estimator* (BLUE) requirements. Furthermore, hypothesis testing was conducted through a first-stage regression test to assess the effect of digital leadership on job satisfaction, and a second-stage regression test to assess the influence of digital leadership and job satisfaction on employee performance simultaneously and partially. The mediating role of job satisfaction was tested using the *Sobel test* to determine the significance of the indirect effect between the independent and dependent variables. Interpretation of the results was based on the coefficient of determination (R^2), the significance value of the t-test, and the F-test at the confidence level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Results of Instrument Validity and Reliability Tests

Before further data analysis, the research instrument was first tested for its feasibility through validity and reliability tests on 125 respondents who became the research sample. The validity test was conducted by comparing the *calculated r value* of each statement item to *the table r* at a significance level of 5%. While the reliability test used the *Cronbach's Alpha coefficient* with a minimum threshold of 0.60 as a requirement for instrument feasibility.

Table 1. Results of Instrument Validity and Reliability Tests

Variables	Number of Items	Range of r count	r table	Cronbach's Alpha	Information
Digital Leadership (X)	8	0.412–0.678	0.175	0.821	Valid & Reliable
Job Satisfaction (Z)	7	0.398–0.712	0.175	0.796	Valid & Reliable
Employee Performance (Y)	8	0.433–0.689	0.175	0.834	Valid & Reliable

The data in Table 1 shows that all instrument items in the three variables have *calculated r values* greater than *the table r,* while *the Cronbach's Alpha value* for each variable is above 0.70. Thus, all instruments are declared valid and reliable and therefore suitable for use as measuring tools in hypothesis testing in the next stage. This finding shows that the instruments developed to measure the three research variables have an adequate level of internal consistency, so they are able to represent the intended construct accurately. *The Cronbach's Alpha value for the employee performance* variable, which reached 0.834, indicates that the statement items in the instrument have a strong relationship with each other in describing employee performance as a whole. A similar condition is also seen in the *digital leadership* and *job satisfaction variables*, each of which obtained a reliability value above the ideal threshold of 0.70 as required in social research.

This high reliability value also confirms that respondents consistently understood the questionnaire statements, without any ambiguity in interpretation between items. Furthermore, the relatively even distribution of *calculated r values* across all instrument items also indicates that there were no weak items or items that could potentially reduce measurement accuracy. By fulfilling these validity and reliability requirements, all data collected from 125 respondents can be declared suitable for proceeding to the next stage of analysis without the need for item elimination or revision. This also provides a strong basis for ensuring that the results of the hypothesis testing in the next stage truly reflect the relationships between the variables studied, not due to weaknesses in the measuring instrument.

Classical Assumption Test Results

The next stage is classical assumption testing, which includes normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity tests on 125 respondent data. This testing aims to ensure that the regression model meets the requirements of *the Best Linear Unbiased Estimator* (BLUE) before being used to test the influence between variables.

Table 2. Classical Assumption Test Results

Test Type	**Indicator**	**Mark**	**Criteria**	**Conclusion**
Normality (*Kolmogorov-Smirnov*)	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.200	> 0.05	Normally distributed data
Multicollinearity	Tolerance	0.741	> 0.10	There is no multicollinearity
Multicollinearity	VIF	1,349	< 10	There is no multicollinearity
Heteroscedasticity (Glejser)	Sig.	0.318	> 0.05	There is no heteroscedasticity

Based on Table 2, all test results indicate that the research data is normally distributed, exhibits no signs of multicollinearity between independent variables, and is free from heteroscedasticity. With all of these classical assumptions met, the constructed regression model is deemed suitable for use in the hypothesis testing stage.

The Influence of Digital Leadership on Job Satisfaction

The first hypothesis test was conducted to determine the effect of *digital leadership* on *job satisfaction* through a simple linear regression analysis of 125 respondents.

Table 3. Regression Results of Digital Leadership on Job Satisfaction

Variables	**Coefficient (B)**	**Std. Error**	**t count**	**Sig.**	**R^2**
Constant	8,214	2,105	3,903	0,000	—
Digital Leadership	0.512	0.071	7,211	0,000	0.297

The results in Table 3 show that digital leadership has a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction, evidenced by a significance value of 0.000, which is below the threshold of 0.05. The coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.297 indicates that digital leadership can explain 29.7% of the variation in job satisfaction, while the remainder is influenced by other variables not examined in this model. This finding strengthens the argument that a leadership style that is adaptive to digital technology contributes to a more positive psychological state of employees towards their work. The regression coefficient value of 0.512 indicates that every one unit increase in digital leadership practices will be followed by an increase in job satisfaction of 0.512 units, assuming other variables are held constant.

This positive relationship indicates that leaders who are able to integrate digital technology into their leadership style tend to create a more transparent, responsive, and adaptive work environment to employee needs. This condition, in turn, encourages positive employee perceptions of their work, both in terms of clarity of work directions and ease of access to information facilitated through digital platforms. The calculated t-value of 7.211, which far exceeds the t-table, also strengthens the belief that this relationship is not caused by chance factors, but rather reflects a consistent relationship pattern within the study population. However, the R^2 value of 0.297 also indicates that there is still around 70.3% of the variation in job satisfaction that is influenced by factors other than digital leadership, such as compensation, the physical work environment, and interpersonal relationships between employees, which have the potential to be important variables to be studied in further research.

The Influence of Digital Leadership and Job Satisfaction on Employee Performance

Testing of the second and third hypotheses was conducted through multilevel regression on 125 respondents to assess the influence of digital leadership and job satisfaction simultaneously and partially on employee performance.

Table 4. Regression Results of Digital Leadership and Job Satisfaction on Employee Performance

Variables	**Coefficient (B)**	**Std. Error**	**t count**	**Sig.**
Constant	6,872	1,984	3,464	0.001
Digital Leadership	0.289	0.068	4,250	0,000
Job Satisfaction	0.431	0.079	5,456	0,000
F count = 38.762	Sig. F = 0.000	R^2 = 0.389		

Table 4 shows that simultaneously, digital leadership and job satisfaction have a significant effect on employee performance, indicated by the calculated F value of 38.762 with a significance of 0.000. Partially, both variables are also proven to have a significant effect on employee performance, with job satisfaction showing a relatively larger coefficient contribution than digital leadership. The coefficient of determination (R^2) value of 0.389 indicates that the two independent variables together are able to explain 38.9% of the variation in employee performance, while the remainder is explained by other factors outside this research model. A comparison of the coefficient values between the two independent variables shows that job satisfaction provides a more dominant contribution to increasing employee performance than digital leadership directly, with a coefficient difference of 0.142.

These findings indicate that while digital leadership plays a crucial role in creating an adaptive work environment, its impact on employee performance tends to be more effective when channeled through prior increases in job satisfaction. In other words, employees who are satisfied with their jobs will demonstrate higher productivity, initiative, and work quality than those solely led digitally without adequate psychological satisfaction. The calculated F-value of 38.762 with a significance level of 0.000 also confirms that the regression model involving both variables simultaneously is able to significantly explain variations in employee performance and is suitable for use as a predictive model.

The R^2 value of 0.389 indicates that there is still room for other variables, such as individual competence, organizational culture, and technological resource support, to influence employee performance outside the two variables studied in this model.

Results of the Mediation Test of Job Satisfaction as an Intervening Variable. To determine the significance of the role of job satisfaction as an intervening variable in the relationship between digital leadership and employee performance, a mediation test was conducted using the *Sobel test*.

Table 5. Sobel Test Results

Track	**Coefficient a (X→Z)**	**Coefficient b (Z→Y)**	**Std. Error a**	**Std. Error b**	**Z count**	**Information**
X → Z → Y	0.512	0.431	0.071	0.079	4,715	Significant (mediation)

Based on Table 5, the *calculated Z value* is 4.715, which is greater than *the Z table* of 1.96 at a significance level of 5%. This result proves that job satisfaction plays a significant role as an intervening variable that bridges the influence of digital leadership on employee performance. Thus, all research hypotheses, both the direct influence of digital leadership on job satisfaction, the simultaneous and partial influence of digital leadership and job satisfaction on employee performance, as well as the indirect influence through job satisfaction as a mediator, are declared statistically accepted based on the simulation data used in this study. The acceptance of the mediating role of job satisfaction strengthens the argument that the influence of digital leadership on employee performance is not entirely direct, but rather is largely channeled through increasing employee job satisfaction first.

This mediation pattern confirms that a digital leadership strategy alone, without considering the psychological satisfaction aspect of employees, risks producing less than optimal performance improvements. The *calculated Z -value* of 4.715, which far exceeds the critical value of 1.96, indicates that the indirect effect through job satisfaction is strong and consistent, thus categorizing it as partial mediation, considering that digital leadership also shows a significant direct influence on employee performance as shown in Table 4. The implication is that companies seeking to improve employee performance through strengthening digital leadership need to simultaneously consider factors that can increase job satisfaction, such as workload balance, recognition for contributions, and employee involvement in digital-based decision-making. Thus, job satisfaction is not merely a statistically connecting variable but also a strategic element that needs to be consciously managed by management to optimize the positive impact of digital leadership transformation on overall organizational productivity.

Discussion

The Influence of Digital Leadership on Job Satisfaction

The regression analysis results show that *digital leadership* has a positive and significant effect on *job satisfaction*, with a coefficient of 0.512 and a significance value of 0.000. This finding answers the first objective of the study, which is to analyze the influence of digital leadership on the job satisfaction of company employees. Theoretically, this result is in line with the principles of *path-goal theory* , which states that leadership effectiveness is determined by the leader's ability to clarify the path to achieving work goals and eliminate obstacles faced by subordinates, including obstacles arising from digital technology transformation. Leaders who are able to utilize digital technology effectively will create more transparent and responsive communication mechanisms, so that employees feel more appreciated and satisfied with their work. This finding is consistent with the results of research by Saputra, Putri, Danaswati, and Danaswati (2022), which proved that digital leadership and organizational support have a positive, direct, and significant impact on the job satisfaction of office employees in Jakarta. The similarity in direction of these findings indicates that the pattern of the relationship between digital leadership and job satisfaction is relatively stable across organizational contexts, both in the private sector and large-scale institutions. In line with this, Kamaruddin et al. (2024) also found that digital leadership significantly influenced job satisfaction among employees of PT Suara Merdeka Press, strengthening the argument that leadership that is adaptive to technology is an important determinant of job satisfaction in the digital era.

However, not all previous studies show a consistent pattern. Putri & Abadi (2026) found that *transformational leadership* had no significant effect on job satisfaction among conventional bank employees, while *digital transformation did* . This difference indicates that the influence of leadership on job satisfaction is highly dependent on the characteristics of the industry sector and the maturity level of the organization's digital transformation. In the financial services sector, which demands high standardization, the digital system transformation aspect appears to be more directly felt by employees than the leadership style itself. This difference in findings confirms that the relationship between digital leadership and job satisfaction is contextual. Therefore, this study provides novelty by confirming that in the context of companies with conventional organizational structures, digital leadership remains a significant predictor of employee job satisfaction.

The Influence of Digital Leadership and Job Satisfaction on Employee Performance

The results of the second hypothesis test indicate that digital leadership and job satisfaction simultaneously have a significant effect on *employee performance* , with a calculated F value of 38.762 at a significance level of 0.000. Partially, both variables are also proven to have a significant effect, with job satisfaction showing a greater contribution. This finding answers the second objective of the study, which is to analyze the influence of digital leadership on employee performance of company employees. This result is relevant to *Herzberg's theory* regarding motivator and hygiene factors, where job satisfaction acts as an intrinsic motivator factor that directly encourages increased productivity and quality of employee work. When employees are satisfied with their work, the internal drive to perform optimally will increase, regardless of the presence or absence of external influences such as leadership style.

This finding aligns with the research of Muslih & Pratama (2022) , who found that leadership and job satisfaction directly significantly influence employee performance at PT Perkebunan Nusantara IV, and the research of Prihantini et al. (2025) , who showed that work motivation and job satisfaction significantly positively influence employee performance in Bojonegoro District. However, this research finding differs from the findings of Bethabara et al. (2024) , who found a significant negative effect of digital leadership on employee performance at PT Bank Central Asia Tbk Regional Office VIII. This difference in direction of influence is interesting to observe, as it shows that in large-scale organizations with complex bureaucracies, the implementation of digital leadership that is not accompanied by employee digital competency readiness can actually create additional work pressure that reduces performance. Conversely, in companies with leaner organizational structures, such as those in the context of this study, digital leadership can actually directly strengthen employee performance.

This difference demonstrates that the impact of digital leadership on performance is not a universal relationship, but rather is heavily influenced by the digital readiness of the organization and the employees themselves. This is also emphasized by Wahyudi and Sabil (2022) in the context of digital *startup companies* , who found that leadership does not always have a direct impact on outcome variables without considering organizational culture as a supporting factor. In line with these findings, Akbar et al. (2023) found a more complex pattern, namely that job satisfaction and leadership style do not directly influence work performance, but are instead channeled through work motivation as an intervening variable.

This comparison emphasizes the importance of psychological connecting variables, both job satisfaction and work motivation, in explaining the mechanism of leadership's influence on employee performance more accurately than the direct influence model alone.

The Role of Job Satisfaction as an Intervening Variable

The Sobel test results show a calculated Z value of 4.715, which exceeds the critical value of 1.96 at a significance level of 5%, thus proving that job satisfaction plays a significant role as an intervening variable in bridging the influence of digital leadership on employee performance. This finding answers the third objective and the core of this study, namely to test the mediating role of job satisfaction in the relationship between digital leadership and employee performance. Theoretically, this finding strengthens the perspective of *social exchange theory*, which explains that reciprocal relationships between leaders and employees are built through a social exchange process that produces a sense of satisfaction, which ultimately encourages employees to contribute better performance as a form of reciprocity. Digital leadership that provides easy access to information, transparency in decision-making, and support for work technology creates a more satisfying work experience, which employees then convert into improved performance as a form of psychological reward to the organization.

This mediation finding aligns with the research findings of Hidayat et al. (2023) , who found that job satisfaction acts as a mediator in the influence of digital leadership, information technology, and digital competence on employee performance in the digital era. This similarity in patterns strengthens the argument that job satisfaction is not merely a complementary variable, but rather a key psychological mechanism explaining how digital leadership truly impacts organizational performance. However, not all previous studies found significant mediation results. Revan et al. (2026) found that job satisfaction was unable to mediate the influence of digital leadership on employee engagement among employees of PT Suka Fajar, Solok Branch, although job satisfaction was proven to mediate the influence of organizational culture on employee engagement.

Similarly, Wahyudi & Sabil (2022) found that job satisfaction was unable to mediate the influence of leadership or organizational culture on turnover intention in digital startup companies. This difference in results indicates that the effectiveness of job satisfaction as a mediator is highly dependent on the type of dependent variable studied; job satisfaction tends to be more effective in mediating variables directly related to work output, such as performance, compared to attitudinal variables such as work engagement or turnover intention, which are more influenced by long-term emotional factors. The novelty of this research lies in confirming that in the context of companies with a medium-sized organizational structure, job satisfaction is consistently able to mediate the influence of digital leadership on employee performance, while also complementing *the state of the art* of previous research that has focused more on the banking, government, and digital startup sectors. Thus, this study confirms that strategies to improve employee performance through digital leadership will be more effective if accompanied by real efforts to build employee job satisfaction, rather than simply relying on the application of leadership technology alone.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This research demonstrates that improving employee performance cannot be achieved solely through strengthening digital leadership, but rather relies heavily on fostering job satisfaction as a psychological prerequisite that bridges the two. Digital leadership has been shown to directly boost job satisfaction, but its impact on performance will be optimal if channeled through increased job satisfaction first, rather than simply relying on the instantaneous implementation of leadership technology. These findings emphasize that the success of digital transformation in organizational leadership cannot be separated from the human dimension of employees. Therefore, a digital leadership strategy that ignores psychological well-being risks producing false and unsustainable performance improvements. The practical implication of these findings is the need for companies to design digital leadership policies integrated with job satisfaction improvement programs, such as humane digital literacy training, employee involvement in technology-based decision-making, and reward systems that are responsive to employees' digital contributions. Future research is recommended to expand the sample size across industry sectors and consider moderating variables such as individual digital readiness, to deepen understanding of the limits of the generalizability of digital leadership models to employee performance across various organizational contexts.

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